

## And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal Priesthood. (25:13)

Preceding Pinchas' act of zealotry, the only anointed *Kohanim* were Aharon and his sons, with every male child born afterwards immediately entering into the family as a *Kohen*. Pinchas, however, was already alive at the time that Aharon and his sons (of whom one was Elazar, Pinchas' father) were designated as *Kohanim*. Only after Pinchas acted decisively to preserve the honor of the nation, and to glorify Hashem's Name, Hashem designated him as a *Kohen*. In an alternative explanation, Hashem promised that all *Kohanim Gedolim* would descend from Pinchas. The *Sefarim HaKedoshim* explain that it was for good reason that Pinchas was not initiated into the *Kehunah*, Priesthood, prior to slaying Zimri. Had he been a *Kohen*, he would have been disqualified from service in the *Mishkan*, since a *Kohen* who takes a life may no longer serve. Thus, when Pinchas punished Zimri, he was a *Yisrael*.

The *Bais Yisrael*, *zl*, wonders why this would transform his status. Whether he was a *Kohen* or not – he was a murderer – and one who takes a life is disqualified from serving even if he “becomes” a *Kohen* after the fact. The *Rebbe* explains that, in effect, transitioning from a *Yisrael* to a *Kohen* transformed Pinchas into a new person. He was no longer the same person he was when he ended Zimri's life. The *Rebbe* related a story which supports this idea.

A young married *avreich*, Torah student, approached *Horav Boruch*, *zl*, *m'Medzhbizh*, grandson of the *Baal Shem Tov*. He was shocked that the *Rebbe* ignored him. Receiving a “royal” snub from such a big *tzaddik* can be disheartening – to say the least. Apparently, this young man had allowed his Torah study and knowledge to go to his head, leading him to act somewhat arrogantly. A *talmid chacham* – or anyone for that matter – must realize that arrogance is one of the most self-destructive character traits. This young man was basically a decent, devout *ben Torah* who had gotten carried away with his success. It happens. When he saw the *Rebbe* had ignored him, he sat outside, silently contemplating what he could have done that might catalyze such a reaction from the holy *Rebbe*. It finally dawned on him that he was acting in a haughty manner. He decided to return, to attempt to beg the *Rebbe*'s forgiveness.

How shocked he was that the *Rebbe* came out to greet and welcome him in like a long-lost son. The *Rebbe*'s three-year old grandson witnessed the entire “before” and “after” transformation, whereby the *Rebbe* first ignored the young man only to later greet him lovingly. “*Zaidy*, is he not the same person whom you ignored earlier. What happened?” The *Rebbe* replied, “You are mistaken. He is not the same man who was here earlier. He is a new and different person.” *Teshuvah* does that.

Often, a sinner refrains from performing *teshuvah*, believing that repentance cannot transform his past. “What is the point?” he wonders. “Even if I do *teshuvah*, I will still carry the stigma and shame of my earlier deeds.” This erroneous belief paralyzes him, chaining him to his former self. What he

fails to understand is that, in Hashem's eyes, *teshuvah* does not merely cleanse – it recreates. Through sincere *teshuvah*, the sinner is refashioned into a *briah chadashah*, new creation. This is not mere poetry; it is reality in the Heavenly sphere. The sinner that was – is no longer.

His misdeeds belong to someone else. A new identity emerges – one forged not by perfection, but by brokenness, struggle, and a yearning for closeness to Hashem. Thus, the question is not, “How can I live with my past?”, but rather, “Am I not ready to begin anew?” In His infinite mercy, Hashem grants each and every one of us the ability to press “reset” and become an entirely different person.